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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

"-----"

Happy New Year everybody!! I hope that your New Year's celebration was enjoyable. I have to admit, ours were more quiet than usual this year. We spent New Year's Eve day in a Maine courthouse because I had to deal with my brother and his filing of a protection order of harassment against me. It all pertains to his lack of cooperation with my duties as the Personal Rep for my father's estate; so this was one way for him to delay my getting into my father's house to take inventory of any personal assets. There was no basis for the order, and the judge dismissed it. Now to see what foolishness he attempts next. Meanwhile I've had to file a complaint in order to get access, without further complications. We'll see...

Otherwise, we managed to get back home in the late afternoon. We had a quick meal, and then tried to unwind from the long, tenuous day. I did manage to make it to the new year while watching some of the usual Three Stooges marathon. Hey, we all have our favorites!

So, let's get started off right for the new year, and welcome in 2013!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Android-Powered Game Console, 'Ouya' Ships!
"-----" "GameStick" the Size of a USB Memory Stick!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

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"GameStick" Will Be the Size of a USB Memory Stick, Plug into Your TV

When the Ouya game console (scheduled to launch in April) made headlines last year, it was for three reasons. One, its size and price - the \$99 box, which plugs into a TV, is the size of a Rubik's cube. Two, its choice of operating system - it runs the same Android OS which powers smartphones and tablets. And three - its rise to fame on Kickstarter, where it shattered records and received millions of dollars in funding not from venture capitalists, but from gamers who wanted to see it made.

Now GameStick, "The Most Portable TV Games Console Ever Created," is preparing to make a name for itself in exactly the same ways. Except that in some of them, it surpasses the Ouya.

Up to this point, pretty much all home game consoles have been a box that sits on your shelf and plugs in to your TV. (Some PCs even do this these days.)

The GameStick, on the other hand, is about the size of a USB memory stick or a tube of lip balm. It plugs into a TV's HDMI port, and connects to a wireless controller (or even a mouse and keyboard) via Bluetooth. It "works with any Bluetooth controller supporting HID," and will come with its own small gamepad, which features twin analog sticks and a slot to put the GameStick itself inside when not in use.

Do we know if it works yet?

GameStick's creators showed off pictures of a nonworking "Mark 1 Prototype Model," and posted video of a "Reference Board" actually playing games while plugged into a television. This was a roughly USB-stick-sized circuit board, which lacked an outer case.

The reference unit had wires coming out of it, but the GameStick FAQ explains that on new, "MHL compliant TVs" it can draw power straight from the HDMI port, in much the same way that many USB devices are powered by a USB connection. A USB connector cable will be supplied with GameStick just in case, and "there will also be a power adapter."

What about the games?

The GameStick reference unit was playing an Android game called Shadowgun, an over-the-shoulder third-person shooter which is considered technically demanding by Android device standards.

GameStick's creators say "We have some great games lined up already," and AFP Relax confirms that it has roughly the same internal specs as the Ouya, plus a lineup at launch of about a dozen games including several AAA Android titles.

How much will it cost, and when will it be out?

GameStick is available for preorder now from its Kickstarter page for \$79. (The price includes the controller as well.) It has an estimated delivery date of April if the project is fully funded - and with 28 days to go, it had more than reached its \$100,000 goal.

Makers of \$99 Android-Powered Game Console Ship First 1,200 'Ouyas'

Like Nintendo's Wii U game console, the Ouya (that's "OOH-yuh") has an unusual name and even more unusual hardware. The console is roughly the size of a Rubik's cube, and is powered by Android, Google's open-source operating system that's normally found on smartphones and tablets.

Ouya's makers, who are preparing the console for its commercial launch, encourage interested gamers to pop the case open and use it in electronics projects ... or even to write their own games for it. Especially if they're among the 1,200 who are about to receive their own clear plastic Ouya developer consoles.

The limited-edition consoles, which have been shipped out to developers already, are not designed for playing games on. They don't even come with any.

Rather, the point of these consoles is so that interested Android developers can write games for the Ouya, which will then be released to gamers when the console launches to the public. Fans who pledged at least \$1,337 to Ouya's record-breaking Kickstarter project will get one, and while they're not quite suited for playing games on - "we know the D-pad and triggers on the controller still need work," Ouya's makers say - the clear plastic developer consoles serve as a preview of what the finished product will look like, and a reminder of Ouya's "openness."

You keep using that word ...

In the food and drug industries, terms like "organic" and "all-natural" are regulated so that only products which meet the criteria can have them on their labels. In the tech world, however, anyone can claim that their product is "open," for whatever definition of "open" they like.

The term was popularized by the world's rapid adoption of open-source software, like Android itself, where you're legally entitled to a copy of the programming code and can normally use it in your own projects (like Ouya's makers did). But when tech companies say that something is "open," they don't necessarily mean that the code or the hardware schematics use an open-source license.

Ouya's makers have released their ODK, or developer kit, under the same open-source license as Android itself. This allows aspiring game developers to practice their skills even without a developer console, and to improve the kit however they want. The hardware itself is currently a "closed" design, however, despite the clear plastic case. The makers have expressed enthusiasm for the idea of hardware hackers using it in projects, and have said, "We'll even publish the hardware design if people want it," but so far they haven't done so.

What about the games?

The most relevant aspect of "openness" to normal gamers is that Ouya's makers say "any developer can publish a game." This model is unusual for the console world, where only select studios are allowed to publish their wares on (for instance) the PlayStation Network, but is more familiar to fans of the anything-goes Google Play store for Android. Several big-name Android developers - including console game titan Square-Enix - have already signed up to have their wares on the Ouya.

Preordered Ouya game consoles (the normal ones, not the developer edition) will ship in April. They will cost \$99 once sales are opened to the general public.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

U.S. Ends Long Google Probe with Only Mild Reprimand

In a major victory for Google Inc, U.S. regulators on Thursday ended their investigation into the giant Internet company and concluded that it had not manipulated its Web search results to hurt rivals.

The Federal Trade Commission did, however, win promises from Google that it would end the practice of "scraping" reviews and other data from rivals' websites for its own products, and to allow advertisers to export data to independently evaluate advertising campaigns.

Google also agreed to no longer request sales bans when suing companies which infringe on patents that are essential to ensuring interoperability, also known as standard essential patents, the FTC said on Thursday.

Microsoft Corp and other Google competitors have pressed the FTC to bring a broad antitrust case against Google similar to the sweeping Justice Department litigation against Microsoft in the 1990s.

Meanwhile smaller Internet companies such as Nextag have complained about Google tweaking its Web search results to give prominence to its own products, pushing down competitors' rankings and making them more difficult for customers to find.

At a press conference, FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz anticipated criticism of the agency's decision to not further pursue Google on the so-called subject of search bias.

"Even though people would like us to bring a big search bias case, the facts aren't there," he said.

"The changes Google have agreed to make ensure that consumers continue to reap the benefits of competition in the online marketplace and in the market for innovative wireless devices they enjoy," said Leibowitz.

The commission voted 4 to 1 to settle the patent investigation into Google's injunction requests. It voted 5 to 0 to end the probe of Google's search practices.

The news had little impact on Google shares, which closed up 42 cents at \$723.67, as most investors had expected the FTC probe to conclude without inflicting major damage.

"I never saw any real likelihood that the feds were going to insert themselves between one of the most popular brands in the world and the constituency that adores it," said Whit Andrews, an analyst for Gartner Inc.

Yelp, which operates the social networking/user review website yelp.com, had complained about scraped reviews, and said it was disappointed with the result of the FTC probe.

"The closure of the commission's investigation into search bias by Google without action ... represents a missed opportunity to protect innovation in the Internet economy," wrote Yelp spokesman Vince Sollitto in an email. "We look for the regulatory bodies continuing their investigation to have greater success."

Microsoft had no immediate comment, but Dave Heiner, its deputy general counsel, complained in a blog post on Wednesday about "Google's misconduct," specifically blocking a fully featured YouTube, which Google owns, from the Windows Phone.

Gary Reback, who represents a group of Google's critics including Nextag, said he thought the investigation was inadequate since the FTC failed to respond to his clients' assertions that they had been hurt by Google and asked few questions in its civil subpoenas.

"They talked about how thorough and exhaustive the investigation was but that's really rubbish," said Reback, who is with the law firm Carr & Ferrell LLP and is best known for his work against Microsoft in the 1990s. "I've never seen anything as shallow and incomplete as this was."

Microsoft was embroiled in antitrust probes and litigation from 1990 when the FTC began an investigation until 2011, when the final consent decree finally expired.

Leibowitz defended the commission's investigation into Google, saying the agency had scoured through some 9 million pages of documents and taken sworn testimony from key Google executives. "This was an incredibly thorough and careful investigation by the commission, and the outcome is a strong and enforceable set of agreements," he said.

Google's David Drummond, the company's chief legal officer, said the FTC announcement on Thursday meant that "Google's services are good for users and good for competition."

Thomas Rosch, who is leaving the commission this month, suggested the investigation fell short.

"After promising an elephant more than a year ago, the commission instead has brought forth a couple of mice," said Rosch, a Republican.

The FTC broke with its usual practice of requiring a consent decree to settle an investigation. Instead it allowed Google to write a letter pledging to implement the agreed-upon changes in the search portion of the probe.

That prompted some sharp questions about whether Google would live up to its pact.

"I have no reason to think that Google won't honor their commitment; I

think they will," said Leibowitz, noting financial penalties if Google failed to do so.

One Google competitor seemed to think the FTC agreement with Google would be a small boon to competitors.

"The concessions that the FTC extracted on review scraping, patents, and data are real, but not game changers by any means," said Oren Etzioni, co-founder of Decide.com, a product website that advises shoppers when prices may change or new versions of gadgets may come out.

Some of Google's critics, anticipating a weak conclusion to the FTC's investigation, said in December that they may be ready to take their grievances to the Justice Department.

The European Union, based in Brussels, is conducting a parallel probe of Google. It announced on December 18 that it was giving the company a month to come up with proposals to resolve its probe.

The European Commission has been examining informal settlement proposals from Google since July but has not sought feedback from the complainants, suggesting it is not convinced by what Google has put on the table so far.

Google is also being looked at by a group of state attorneys general, led by Texas.

In August, Google was forced to pay \$22.5 million to settle charges it bypassed the privacy settings of customers using Apple Inc's Safari browser. The practice was in violation of a 2011 consent decree with the FTC over a botched rollout of the now defunct social network Buzz.

New Law Makes It Illegal for Employers in California and Illinois To Demand Facebook Passwords

New laws that took effect on January 1st, 2013 make it illegal for employers to demand access to their workers password-protected Facebook accounts. After some high-profile instances of companies requiring access to employees accounts, Congress was asked to consider a law making such demands illegal on the grounds that they constitute an invasion of privacy. Congress blocked the law, however its decision had no bearing on laws being considered at the state level. Now, California and Illinois have become the first two states to make it expressly illegal for employers to make such demands, Reuters reports. The new laws also apply to other similar social networks and are not limited to just Facebook.

FCC Adopts Rules to Promote Internet Onboard Aircraft

The Federal Communications Commission has adopted a Report and Order establishing rules to help speed the deployment of Internet services onboard aircraft. The Commission's action enables broadband providers to meet increasing consumer demands and promotes the economic growth and job-creating impacts of ubiquitous broadband. This action also continues the FCC's efforts to update and streamline regulatory requirements across

the agency.

Since 2001, the Commission has authorized a number of companies, on an /ad hoc /basis, to operate Earth Stations Aboard Aircraft (ESAA), i.e., earth stations on aircraft communicating with Fixed-Satellite Service (FSS) geostationary-orbit (GSO) space stations. Installed on the exterior of the aircraft, the satellite antenna carries the signal to and from the aircraft, providing two-way, in-flight broadband services to passengers and flight crews. The Report and Order formalizes ESAA as a licensed application in the FSS and establishes a regulatory framework for processing applications while ensuring other radio service operations are protected from harmful interference. Rather than have to license on-board systems on an ad hoc basis, airlines will be able test systems that meet FCC standards, establish that they do not interfere with aircraft systems, and get FAA approval.

By reducing administrative burdens on both applicants and the Commission, the new rules should allow the Commission to process ESAA applications up to 50 percent faster, enhancing competition in an important sector of the mobile telecommunications market in the United States and promoting the widespread availability of Internet access to aircraft passengers.

Action by the Commission, December 20, 2012, by Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Report and Order (FCC 12-161). Separate statement issued by Chairman Genachowski.

IB Docket No.: 12-376

-FCC-

World's First Eye-Tracking PC Accessory to Launch in 2013

Tobii plans to launch the world's first consumer eye-tracking PC peripheral in 2013. A little larger than a pen, it's a thin device that attaches below the monitor of any Window 8 PC.

Eye-tracking technology has been slowly emerging as a viable technology the last couple of years, and it comes in real handy when you want to know which parts of a Facebook profile people actually look at. One of the leaders in the space, Tobii, is set to bring the tech to consumers in 2013 with a peripheral that works with any Windows 8 PC.

Tobii will show off its eye tracker, called the REX, next week at CES. The REX is a strip that attaches beneath your monitor (desktops and laptops are welcome), and it plugs into a USB port. Once it's in place, the device works with special software called Tobii Gaze to track exactly what you're looking at on the screen, letting you do things as mundane as scrolling sideways or as exciting as blasting asteroids - all with a glance.

We don't know how much the final product will cost, but there's a clue. The REX is available now to developers, and it costs \$995. Tobii says it'll only be making 5,000 of the REX peripherals available for consumer purchase.

Tobii expects to launch the REX in the fall. You can't pre-order them yet, but you can sign up here to receive a "VIP pre-order invitation," which are planned to go out in March.

Tobii is clear that this new technology is intended to work with (not instead of) a mouse and keyboard, and it's not simply an assistive tech for the disabled either. Eye tracking will be a big part of human-machine interaction in the future - at least as Tobii sees it. We're excited to try it out for ourselves next week.

Can the Government Really Ban Twitter Parody Accounts?

Arizona is entertaining a law that will make it a felony to use another person's real name to make an Internet profile intended to "harm, defraud, intimidate or threaten," which to some sounds like a law against parody Twitter accounts. The legislation, if passed, would make Arizona one of a few states, including New York, California, Washington and Texas, to enact anti-online-impersonation laws. If these regulations seek to put a stop to fake representations online, that does sound like the end of fake celebrity baby accounts and Twitter death hoaxes. Then again, these laws have existed in these other places for years, and that hasn't stopped the faux accounts from coming in. So what then does this mean?

What kind of stuff is the law intended to prosecute?

The law does not say that all uses of another person's real name can be charged as a felony, but only profiles made for the more nefarious purposes fall into that territory. The legislation is targeted at more serious forms of impersonation, like cyber bullying. Two Texas teens were arrested and charged under this law for creating a fake Facebook page to ruin a peer's reputation, for example. Or, the case of Robert Dale Esparza Jr. who created a fake profile of his son's vice principal on a porn site might fall under this law, suggests The Arizona Republic's Alia Beard Rau. Or, in one of the cases brought to court under the Texas version of this law, an Adam Limle created websites that portrayed a woman he used to date as a prostitute. (The case was eventually dropped because of a geographical loophole. Limle lived in Ohio, not Texas.)

Okay, the harm and threat in those situations is pretty clear. How can it at all apply to something relatively harmless, like a Twitter parody account?

The term "harm" is pretty vague, as this Texas Law blog explains, referring to that state's version of this legislation, on which Arizona based its own law. "'Harm' can be very broadly construed one person's joke is another person's harm," writes Houston lawyer Stephanie Stradley.

So, that could extend to parody accounts then?

Well, possibly. Stradley suggests that politicians who had parody accounts created to mock them might have a case. Some of the impersonation of Texas lawmakers has gone beyond just the jokey fake Twitter handle. Jeffwentworth.com is not the official site for Texas state senator, but rather redirects to the web site of the anti-tax advocate group Empower Texans which considers the San Antonio politician the most liberal Republican senator in Austin. Wentworth told The New York Times this domain squatting amounted to "identity theft," and could be the basis for the law's usage.

The law could also possibly effect sillier parody accounts, suggest privacy advocates. "The problem with this, and other online impersonation bills, is the potential that they could be used to go after parody or social commentary activities," senior staff attorney for the Electronic Frontier Foundation Kurt Opsahl told The Arizona Republic's Alia Beard Rau. "While this bill is written to limit 'intent to harm,' if that is construed broadly, there could be First Amendment problems."

Ok, but what about precedent? Has the law ever applied to a faux Twitter handle?

Twitter has its own parody policy that mitigates a lot of the possible damage that could ever lead to a court case. Saint Louis Cardinals manager Anthony La Russa sued Twitter in 2009 because of a made-up account, but the account was removed before the case went anywhere (And that was before these laws went into effect.)

But it's not clear that parody would ever be considered harmful enough for the law. When California's version went into effect, a first amendment lawyer suggested to SF Weekly's Joe Eskenazi that jokes could go pretty far without prosecution. "You're going to have to have room for satire," he said. The account would have to look fool people, he argued. "A key question is, 'is it credibile?'" asks Simitian. "Do people who read it think it's him?" Because of our increasing skepticism of things on Twitter, unless the site has verified checkmark, it's unlikely that most people believe in a fake account for long. So, unless the imitation tweeter does something extremely harmful to someone's character, it doesn't sound like anyone would have a strong case. Alas, parody Twitter accounts, for better or worse (worse, right?) are here to stay.

Acer and Asus To Stop Making Netbooks

The last two major netbook manufacturers, Acer and Asus, are closing the doors on these mini-laptops. According to Digitimes' Monica Chen and Joseph Tsai, Acer "has no plans to release more netbook products" such as its Aspire One, while Asus has already ended its Eee PC line.

Other netbook manufacturers, such as Samsung, have long since abandoned the market.

Netbooks were "still enjoying strong sales" as late as 2010, according to an optimistic report by ABI Research. But the growth trend which it predicted flattened out and declined, thanks to four factors pointed out by the Guardian's Charles Arthur.

One is that the original, Linux-based netbooks failed to catch on, as they had trouble running Windows PC software. But Microsoft charged between \$30 and \$50 for each netbook's Windows license, and insisted that the new crop of Windows netbooks be larger and more expensive than the original Linux-based models. This placed them in close competition with low-end laptops, the prices of which were going down instead of up.

The other biggest factor is that the iPad and Android tablets took the place of netbooks for many buyers. While Apple's iPad was the price of a full-sized laptop, the company soon introduced discounted or refurbished versions ... as well as the smaller, \$329 iPad Mini, which doesn't cost much more than most netbooks. Besides that, the whole iPad line was even

lighter than netbooks and had longer battery life, besides being more responsive and having more popular apps.

Meanwhile, companies like Amazon and Barnes and Noble made \$199 Kindle and Nook tablets, which beat out even the original \$249 Linux-based Asus Eee's price tag.

During the netbook's heyday, many called for Apple to make one of its own. As Apple tech expert John Gruber pointed out, however, netbooks were "cheaper, not better," which contradicted Apple's business model of selling high-margin, premium products.

When Apple did release a small laptop computer, it was the \$999 11-inch MacBook Air, which went on to be a best-seller. Other PC manufacturers tried to follow in Apple's footsteps with Intel's "Ultrabook" specification, which is basically a recipe for MacBook Air clones that run Windows, but so far have failed to make a dent in the market.

Besides Ultrabooks, the other notable netbook-like computers on the market right now are Chromebooks, ultralight laptops which start at \$199 and run a slimmed-down OS based on Google's Chrome web browser. Former netbook manufacturers Samsung and Acer are both making Chromebooks, while Asus manufactured Google's popular Nexus 7 tablet.

As Netbooks Crash and Burn, Amazon's Best-selling Laptop Is A Chromebook

Netbooks may be on the way out as companies like Acer and Asus cease production, but it is becoming increasingly clear that there is still a market for low-cost laptops in a world where tablets are taking over. Microsoft's new Windows 8 operating system has been eating up most of the news cycle when it comes to notebook computers, but Google's Chrome OS shouldn't be counted out just yet. Online retail giant Amazon currently lists a Google-powered Chromebook built by Samsung (005930) as the best-selling laptop on its website. To make things even more interesting, Amazon's own stock of the \$250 Chromebook is sold out but it remains a top-seller even though it is now being sold at a 30% premium by other vendors through the Amazon website.

Perl Programming Language Marks 25th Birthday

Perl, the open source programming language used by developers and sysadmins to automate any number of text-wrangling and data-management tasks, celebrates its 25th birthday on Tuesday.

It was on December 18, 1987 that Larry Wall released Perl 1.0, posting the source code to the Usenet newsgroup comp.sources.misc.

Wall had begun developing the language while working as a programmer at Unisys, and had initially intended it to be a Unix scripting language in the vein of sh or awk. The language grew quickly, however, steadily adding new features in subsequent releases over the next few years.

By the time Perl 5 shipped in 1994, it had developed into a full-fledged general programming tool with support for modern language features

including objects, references, modules, and rich native support for regular expressions.

Around the same time, web developers began adopting Perl as the go-to language for coding CGI scripts, an early method of developing web applications. The fact that Perl is an interpreted language made scripts quick to write and easy to debug, and its strong text-processing capabilities made it ideally suited for outputting complex HTML.

Perl has fallen out of favor for web development somewhat in recent years, its role having in large part been subsumed by more recent upstarts such as PHP, Python, and Ruby.

Critics often take a negative view of Perl's somewhat idiosyncratic syntax, which can make Perl programs difficult to maintain (even, sometimes, for the original developer, if much time has passed). As such, Perl has occasionally been described as a "write-only language".

Fans of the language deny the charges, however, arguing that Perl's flexible syntax and its overarching philosophy "there's more than one way to do it" are actually two of its greatest strengths.

And if web developers have shunned Perl of late, it still enjoys a healthy and loyal following among systems administrators, scientists, database admins, and anyone else who appreciates what Wall describes as "the three great virtues of a programmer": laziness, impatience, and hubris.

These days, Perl is available on almost every OS platform imaginable, ranging from Windows and OS X to Unix systems and IBM mainframes. For a while, Nokia even maintained a version of the language for System 60 smartphones.

Eighteen years after Perl 5 was released, it still remains the most popular version of the language, with the current stable version of that branch numbered 5.16.

Separately, however, a portion of the Perl community has moved on to Perl 6, a troubled rewrite that intentionally breaks compatibility with earlier versions. Despite good intentions and lofty goals, Perl 6 has remained in "active development" for over a decade, yet is still considered "not production ready".

In fact, when Perl 6 developers are asked when it will be released, the customary response has always been "Christmas" though no one ever specifies which year. That jokey response is typical of the laid-back attitude of the Perl community, though, and Larry Wall clearly wouldn't have it any other way.

Wall continues to oversee Perl development as the language's official Benevolent Dictator for Life, and plans to do so through the development of Perl 6 and beyond, having said in a 2008 interview, "My vision of Perl's future is that I hope I don't recognize it in 20 years."

Why Some Facebook Users Constantly Update Status

Scientists have found what compels people to constantly update their Facebook status. College students who posted more status updates than they

normally did feel less lonely over the course of a week, even if no one "Liked" or commented on their posts, researchers found.

"We got the idea to conduct this study during a coffee-break sharing random stories about what friends had posted on Facebook," psychology researcher Fenne große Deters, of the Universitat Berlin, told LiveScience in an email. "Wondering why posting status updates is so popular, we thought that it would be thrilling to study this new form of communication empirically."

Deters and her colleague recruited about 100 undergraduates (all Facebook users) at the University of Arizona. All participants filled out initial surveys to measure their levels of loneliness, happiness and depression, and they gave the researchers access to their Facebook profiles by friending a dummy user created for the experiment.

The students were sent an analysis of their average weekly status updates (online wall-memos) and some of the participants were then told to post more statuses than usual over the next seven days. During that week, all completed a short online questionnaire at the end of each day about their mood and level of social connection.

Compared with the group of students who didn't adjust their social media habits, those who went on a status-writing blitz felt less lonely over the week, the team found. Their happiness and depression levels went unchanged, "suggesting that the effect is specific to experienced loneliness," the researchers wrote. And a drop in loneliness was linked to an increase in feeling more socially connected, which the researchers believe is the cause behind the positive effects of status updating.

Interestingly, the team found that loneliness levels did not depend on whether the students' status updates garnered any comments or "Likes" from Facebook friends. One might assume that a lack of response could be considered a form of rejection, but the act of writing a status update itself might help people feel more connected, the researchers said. When crafting a clever status, Facebook users have a target audience in mind. Simply thinking about their friends (or at least their Facebook friends) can have a "social snacking" effect.

"Similar to a snack temporarily reducing hunger until the next meal, social snacking may help tolerate the lack of 'real' social interaction for a certain amount of time," the researchers wrote in a paper published last month in the journal Social Psychological and Personality Science.

Now with over a billion users, Facebook has become the focus of an increasing number of studies trying to uncover the real-life social side effects that can accompany using the social media site.

For example, research presented last year at the meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) showed how the site offers a dangerous medium for social comparison. People in that study with lots of Facebook friends had lower self-esteem, feeling worse about their place in life and their achievements if they'd just viewed their friends' status updates, compared with people who hadn't recently surfed the site. But for people with just a few Facebook friends, viewing status updates wasn't a problem.

Another study, detailed in the Sept. 13 issue of the journal Nature, found such Facebook friends can influence real-life actions of one another. In that study, one "get out the vote" message sent to 61 million Facebook

users on Election Day 2010 led to 340,000 people casting ballots when they otherwise would not have.

Kicked Off Facebook, Kid Creates Own Social Network

If you can't join it, create your own.

That's the attitude one Florida preteen ran with after his parents banned him from using Facebook. Instead of begging or slamming doors when his account was deactivated, the 11-year-old launched his own social network tailored specifically to children.

Grom Social founder Zachary Marks had a Facebook account for roughly a week despite being two years too young to join the site, having lied about his age to create an account. And when his parents discovered that he may have been engaging in risky online activities, they pulled the plug.

"I spent all my time on the computer chatting with friends. Then, I made mistakes," Marks explained on the Grom Social About page. "One of my adult friends cursed and posted something inappropriate, and I cursed back. Also, I friend-requested grownups who I did not know. About a day later, my dad found out. He was really mad. I had to deactivate my account."

Marks said he wasn't interested in any existing, kid-friendly, social networks. "They were all childish," he said so he set out to create one for "Groms," a slang term for young surfers that he repurposed to mean something close to "precocious kid."

In order to keep kid members safe, only parents and parent-approved adults can join Grom Social. Parents of kid members are kept up to date on their youngster's online activities via email. The site also has a built-in language filter to keep the expletives from flying straight into kids' virgin eyes.

Grom Social is also compliant with COPPA, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, a controversial law aimed at keeping kids safe online that some argue is ineffective and unconstitutionally limits children's First Amendment rights.

Under COPPA, websites, apps and plug-ins are not allowed to collect information from children less than 13 years old without their parent's express consent. The burden of verification, however, simply isn't worth it to most mainstream social networks, including Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Foursquare, so they ban members under 13.

To date, Grom Social has almost 7,000 members and is open to users under 15 in the United States and Canada.

Cats Get Their Own Social Network

Fellow cat owners: ever caught your feline stealing jealous glances at your laptop? Wonder why they keep walking all over your keyboard?

Turns out they're not trying to catch your attention or steal your lap

heat. They just want you to get off Facebook so they can have their turn.

OK, not really - but the world's smartest pets are long overdue for their own social network. And now, thanks to a couple of developers in Malaysia, they just may have found one worthy of them.

The site in question is Catmoji, the brainchild of Matthew Phiong and Koekoe Loo Wan Koe. "We want to be Facebook for cats," the Penang-based programmers told Betabeat.

Facebook isn't the first social network you'll think of when you see the design, however. Check it out:

Pinterest, anyone?

Then again, a picture and video-based social network makes a lot of sense when cats are your subject. None of that pesky text that dogs (so to speak) sites such as Catster or United Cats. Given the international appeal of cats - and the rather shaky English of Catmoji's founders - that's probably for the best. The site does offer the option to tag and filter cat pics according to their emotion (hence the name).

Catmoji only launched on Christmas Eve, so it doesn't have anything in the way of impressive user numbers just yet. But given its founders' obvious passion for the topic, we'll be keeping one beady kitty eye on its growth.

And if you're thinking you've already seen a parody video along the lines of a feline social network, you might be thinking of this:

BONUS: The 33 Most-Watched Cat Videos of All Time

33. Kitten in Hamster Ball

It goes on too long, and could do with a little more motion to justify the Stealer's Wheel soundtrack. But these are forgivable sins in the cat video world, it seems; Tom Tom's spherical plastic antics have racked up more than 11 million views.

Consumer Electronics Show Preview: Apps Replace Operating Systems

In a sign of just how important content and mobility have become to gadget lovers, network providers and device makers will take center stage at the 2013 International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) next week in Las Vegas. For the first time since 1997 Microsoft won't deliver a keynote touting its latest version of Windows. Chipmaker Intel is likewise absent from the keynote lineup. Instead, this year's headliners include Panasonic and Samsung, whose latest electronics are poised to cash in on the wealth of wireless data made available by fellow keynoters Qualcomm and Verizon.

Telecos and hardware makers are picking up where operating system and chip providers left off by providing the infrastructure and interface to increasingly popular mobile apps and multimedia content, says Thomas Stuermer, a senior executive in Accenture's Electronics and High-Tech group, which provides research and consulting services across a number of technologies, including consumer electronics. Now that Microsoft's Windows 8 - one of the stars of last year's CES - has been launched and is slowly starting to get some traction, device makers are free to show

what the OS can do, he adds.

Accenture sees six story lines emerging from the 2013 CES: ultra high-definition TV, "smart" (or connected) cars, fitness and health monitoring, mobile apps, 3-D printing and convertible PCs. Of course most of these technologies have appeared at CES in previous years, but Stuermer says we'll see new levels of maturity that make them worth taking another look. Here's a quick rundown of expected highlights in each category.

Ultra High-Definition TV (Ultra HDTV)

Ultra HDTV is the next step in high-definition television, with four times the resolution as current-generation HDTVs. The challenge is that they're entering the market with a roughly \$20,000 price tag, so they're going to be too expensive in the near term for mass market consumption, especially when considering the lack of available content that can take full advantage of the format, Stuermer says. That sounds a bit like the 3-D TVs that made a splash at CES a few years ago but have since fizzled. Still, Stuermer says ultra high definition is a profound step up from HD that can be explained to consumers in familiar terms such as pixel counts and resolution. "We envision that there will be much more significant take up of this new format than there was for 3-D," as long as the content providers deliver and costs begin to come down, he says.

Samsung, Sharp, LG and several other companies are planning to offer Ultra HDTVs, several of which will debut at CES. Westinghouse recently announced two Ultra HDTVs that weigh in at opposite ends of the size spectrum. The 110-inch version will be one of the largest commercially available sets, whereas the 50-inch version comes in at the low end. To address content concerns, Sony announced that it is making a \$25,000 Ultra HDTV bundled with a hard disk drive containing free ultra high-definition content.

"Smart" Cars

Carmakers and tech companies at CES, including Ford and Microsoft, have been laying the foundation for connected cars over the past several years, touting smart-phone controlled infotainment as well as automated collision-avoidance systems. This year attendees will hear more about the synthesis of automotive software and data sensors that extend to autonomous driving. Ford, for example, says it will implement new driver-assist technologies in its latest Fusion midsize sedan that, for example, can make automatic steering corrections when the car drifts out of its lane and provides alerts to stimulate drowsy drivers. In addition to Ford, carmakers Audi, Chrysler, General Motors, Hyundai, Kia and CES newcomer Subaru will be presenting technologies.

Fitness and Health Monitoring

As in years past, technology for both fitness and remote health monitoring will again have a large presence at CES. New telehealth devices can measure, display and store blood pressure, chronic disease and diet data that can enable doctors and nurses to monitor outpatient health in the patients' homes remotely, thereby avoiding non-critical and costly re-admissions to hospitals and facilitating less obtrusive preventive care, Stuermer says. Smart-phone apps that connect to these devices will also be a big part of fitness and health monitoring.

Mobile Apps

Mobile apps are everywhere, and CES is no exception. In addition to health monitoring and automotive technology, apps are set to play an even bigger role in home entertainment, personal finance and social networking. CES attendees will be hard pressed to find many new technologies that can't be enhanced in one way or another by an accompanying mobile app.

Home 3-D Printing

At least seven companies - including MakerBot, 3D Systems Corp. and Sculpteo - are expected to show 3-D printers or printing services. Their goal is to demonstrate the potential benefits of this additive manufacturing technology for a wide swath of industries and users, whether customers are making jewelry, smart-phone cases or rapid prototypes of new products.

Convertible PCs

Convertibles ostensibly offer PC users the best of both worlds - the touch screen of a tablet and the keyboard of a laptop - in a single package. Twist or turn the monitor in one direction, and it lays flat like a tablet. Twist or turn another way, and it's a clamshell laptop. Still, these devices have had difficulty competing with the pure-bred tablets and laptops they seek to replace. So far sales have been relatively modest for this nascent market, but CES 2013 should draw more attention to these devices, Stuermer says. The key is Windows 8, which wasn't commercially available when last year's crop of convertible PCs were put on display. Now that users have had time to become familiar with Microsoft's latest operating system, designed as a touch-screen OS, PC makers will give convertibles a renewed push.

CES 2013: Is Giant Tech Show Losing Steam?

Next week the Las Vegas lights might seem a bit brighter as thousands of brand-new HDTVs, tablets, phones, cameras, cars - you name it - power up and descend upon Sin City.

The 46th annual Consumer Electronics Show CES 2013 - is upon us.

The show is massive, with more than 33,000 consumer electronics exhibitors, including Samsung, Sony, and Panasonic. Many of them will hold press conferences starting Sunday night, and on Tuesday, the show, which is put on by the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA), will open its doors to 150,000 attendees.

But this also might be the year that demonstrates how much steam CES has been losing over time.

"CES is slowly losing relevance as the industry undergoes continuous change," Patrick Moorhead, principal analyst at Moor Insights & Strategy, told ABC News. "Smaller shows like Mobile World Congress are siphoning off large blocks of attendees and the players are changing too."

One major player has already been lost. Last year Microsoft announced that it was backing out of CES. While Microsoft gave the opening keynote presentation year after year, it won't even have a display booth this year. Qualcomm, which makes processors for mobile devices and other technologies, will kick off the show.

And it's not just Microsoft. While a mobile silicon company will ring in the show, many of the biggest mobile players, including Google, Motorola, HTC, RIM, Nokia, and others don't have events scheduled this year and are gearing up for their own events in January or at Mobile World Congress, a mobile trade show in Barcelona held at the end of February.

"The companies driving technology ecosystems - Apple, Google, Amazon and Microsoft - have not exhibited or no longer exhibit at the show. Rather, they own the audience at their own events," Ross Rubin, principal analyst with Reticle Research, says.

Apple, which has become the biggest player in the industry, has never taken part in CES - at least not officially. According to the Consumer Electronics Association, the 120,000-square-foot iLounge area, which is dedicated to Apple product accessories - cases, docks, etc. - is bigger than most trade shows in America.

But while the buzz and the anticipation of big announcements has been low this year, CEA President and CEO Gary Shapiro says it's going to be a very big year. And you get the feeling he isn't just saying that to tout his own show.

"I think there will be more announcements at this show than any year previously," Shapiro told ABC News. "Exhibitors and major companies are making requests of us that have been unprecedented." Shapiro said he couldn't divulge what those announcements might be, but said major companies are planning to go big.

Sony similarly wouldn't divulge its CES secrets, but the company has one of the biggest booths on the floor and still believes the trade show is a great place to demo its future wares.

"We still believe strongly in the power of CES and the gathering of all the industry people in one place to debut the most important new products and services for the coming year," Sony's Rob Manfredo told ABC News. CES 2013: Giant Tech Trade Show? Or Fading?

But even if the Samsungs, Sonys, Toshibas and Panasonics of the world don't release any jaw-dropping products, the show has become a ground for future technologies and innovation. "Most of the advancements that we see at CES seem to be more in terms of standards and new technologies that multiple companies get behind, particularly in the home audio-visual space - Blu-ray, 3-D, Smart TV, OLED, UltraHD, higher-speed Wi-Fi," Rubin said.

Many predict this year's show will be a big one for even higher-resolution HDTVs (Ultra HDTVs), future car technology, digital health and wellness tools, and home automation.

But whether or not the show ultimately cedes more and more ground to other events and company-specific gatherings, there will still be thousands descending on Las Vegas next week looking for a glimpse of the future. In the words of the CEA's Shapiro, "I'm pretty pumped."

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